



ADA Facts

OxyContin®

OxyContin is a trade name product for the generic narcotic oxycodone hydrochloride, an opiate agonist. Oxycodone is a central nervous system depressant. Oxycodone's action appears to work through stimulating the opioid receptors found in the central nervous system that activate responses ranging from analgesia (pain killing) to respiratory depression to euphoria. People who take the drug repeatedly can develop a tolerance or resistance to the drug's effects. Most individuals who abuse oxycodone seek to gain the euphoric effects, mitigate pain, and avoid withdrawal symptoms associated with oxycodone or heroin abstinence.

▼ The Effects

Oxycodone is abused for its opiate-like effects. The strength, duration, and known dosage of OxyContin are the primary reasons the drug is attractive to both abusers and legitimate users. OxyContin is designed to be swallowed whole; however, abusers ingest the drug in a variety of ways. OxyContin abusers either crush the tablet and ingest or snort it or dilute it in water and inject it. Crushing or diluting the tablet disarms the timed-release action of the medication and causes a quick, powerful high. Abusers have compared this feeling to the euphoria they experience when taking heroin. In fact, in some areas, the use of heroin is overshadowed by the abuse of OxyContin.

The drug is most often administered orally. The growing awareness and concern about AIDS and blood-borne pathogens easily transmitted by syringe needle use, has made the oral availability of Oxycodone attractive to the typical opiate abuser.

▼ "Poor Man's Heroin"

OxyContin and heroin have similar effects; therefore, both drugs are attractive to the same abuser population. OxyContin is sometimes referred to as "poor man's heroin," despite the high price it commands at the street level. A 40 mg tablet of OxyContin by prescription costs approximately \$4 or \$400 for a 100-tablet bottle in a retail pharmacy. Street prices vary depending on geographic location, but generally OxyContin sells for between 50 cents and \$1 per milligram. Thus, the same 100-tablet bottle purchased for \$400 at a retail pharmacy can sell for \$2,000 to \$4,000 illegally.

OxyContin is, however, relatively inexpensive for those covered by health insurance, since the insurance provider covers most costs associated with doctor visits and the prescription. Unfortunately, many OxyContin abusers whose health insurance will no longer pay for prescriptions and who cannot afford the high street-level

prices are attracted to heroin. OxyContin abusers sometimes commit theft, armed robbery, and fraud to sustain their habits.

As with most opiates, the adverse effects of oxycodone abuse are dependence and tolerance development. Oxycodone's co-formulation with acetaminophen has also increased the likelihood of acetaminophen-induced hepatic necrosis with chronic dosing.

▼ Information

For additional information on OxyContin and the abuse and addiction to other prescription drugs, visit the website of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (www.drugabuse.gov).



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